

The March 2012 issue of the *APA Journal* was printed letterpress. The next four pages are reproductions of that issue. The issue was set by hand in 10 pt. Caslon 337 and printed one page at a time on an 8x12 Golding Official by Mike O'Connor.



My first experience

Editor's note: This is the first installment of an on-going series by members regarding their first experience with letterpress and what keeps them interested in letterpress printing.



BRUCE McDONALD #56

One day in July 1952, I was around the corner from my house playing with a couple of school buddies. It started raining really hard so we went inside to Jay's bedroom to finish our pretend Lone Ranger episode. I was on the floor having been 'shot' by one of the guys. As I rolled over, I saw the shape of something and I interrupted our shoot 'em up to ask Jay, "What's that thing under the bed?" He said it's a printing press and pulled it out for me to see the box. It was a Superior Marking Equipment Co. "Star" press and for me it was an epiphany of sorts.

I had to have one! So in August, when I turned eight, my grand dad gave me an Ace press and I was totally smitten.

About the time I was 10 years old, I started bugging my parents to buy me a 5x8 Kelsey. I don't remember exactly how I found out about these tabletop machines that used 'real' type but I couldn't live without one. My dad would not spend "that much money" on what he thought was a toy.

Two years later, I took some savings from my paper route and bought a motorized 9x13 Peerless press. To his credit, my dad did bring it to our home. I had never seen a floor model press before I went and looked at this machine.

I had no idea how to operate it but I was too young and naive to let that get in the way. I received just enough instruction from the man I bought it from to get me started.

I had to stand on an old Coca Cola crate in order to be tall enough to feed the press. I was in heaven! So I now owned a letterpress for 55 years. I have collected a number of other machines along the way but I have held on to the Peerless for sentimental reasons.

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Editor's Note



Since starting the *APA Journal* four years ago and publishing it online, I have caught some gentle ribbing from a friend or two about a letterpress organization having an *online* publication. One could skirt any criticism by pointing out this is an unofficial publication.

But I admit that the light jab or two on this point that it is not letterpress printed does cause me concern at times.

The real reason the *Journal* isn't letterpress printed is that I don't have the proper equipment. For example, all the type you see here is handset. I have no mechanical means of setting type in my 6'x11' printshop that takes up less than half of my garage. My only press is an 8x12 Golding Official (that's a tabletop for those not familiar)—so these pages are printed one at a time.

I'm limited in equipment — almost

to the extreme for such a regular undertaking.

I must also admit that doing the publication online lets me use color photographs and I think it really helps to highlight many of the articles that are published. And besides that, I am not hindered in the least by the number of pages that are published. It's a plus, but that little man inside of me who is the letterpress printer always shakes his head at me in disappointment when the online issue is published. So here, keep this issue and let it be known that O'Connor is at least capable of letterpress printing an actual issue—it's just he's not ambitious enough to do it often.

For those who may not be receiving a notice when the online issue is published, drop me an email so I get you on the list: apa.journal@gmail.com

If you'd like to view the archives of the *Journal*, you can find them here: www.apajournal.net

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And yes, I still have my Ace press.

I cannot tell you why letterpress printing from hand set type still enralls me to this day . . . any more than I can explain what love is and why I feel it towards my wife, children and grandkids.



PETE MORELEWICZ #825

I first learned letterpress from APA member Stuart Bradley at a workshop he offers in his basement print shop. The year was 2007 and I had just recovered from losing a few fingers in my own basement, the result of a hobby accident. My wife encouraged me to take up a safer hobby, and, being a graphic designer and a fan of machinery, Stuart's class was a given.

Under Stuart's tutelage, a friend and I learned about type, furniture, lock-up, ink and all the other facets of letterpress on his C&P Pilot tabletop. After eight hours of patient instruction, we left with a handful of pieces we set and printed ourselves. My wife is a knitter so it seemed proper to print a small card that she could include with her hand-knit gifts. I was so proud of that card that out of the 50 or so that were printed, I ended up giving her only 10 or so. The other cards were hoarded to show off to my friends and family.

Leaving that workshop with a tangible piece of something I created was the key to keeping me interested in letterpress. The seed was planted and for the next few months, Stuart kindly answered my questions. The card cre- in his workshop was used to join APA.



DICK NIEHAUS #650

It all started back in the spring of 1954. I was in the seventh grade and my uncle mentioned that a friend had a printing press to give away and would I be interested? The press was mine!

The best part of the deal was that another uncle worked at a small community weekly and was able to get me anything.

While he was away in Europe, grandpa sold everything to aid the war effort. He came home to no type and press. Because of this, he took an interest in showing me the ropes.

I'm in the eighth grade by this time and what the kids today would call a geek. We didn't have computers to play with, we had something better military surplus radios and we all had Ham Radio licenses. Every Ham operator had what is called a QSL card — similar to the prop cards of APA members. They needed to be printed and I was the source.

I continued printing little projects and expanded the operation as letterpress equipment became available. As I prepared to get married, my mother informed me that when I go, so does all that stuff in the basement. Everything was sold. Twenty-five years later equipment started to accumulate on a small scale. As the addition continued, so did the accumulation. I retired from the commercial printing industry and set up a part-time letterpress operation as something to do and a place to hide. I have had a long enjoyable

ride on the letterpress train as it continues building back the momentum it once had.

I enjoy challenges. Figuring out how to make something happen with the equipment and materials available.



PAUL AKEN #659

I have more than an interest in letterpress; I have a love and passion for it. The question exposes the essence of my life.

My first experience with letterpress was in the ninth grade at junior high school. This was the freshman year for attending Boys Tech and Trade High School. I was sent there by my father who thought I was the dumbest kid he had. His thinking was that I better learn a trade, as I probably couldn't make it through high school. I was the runt of the family, had a big mouth and wasn't very successful at anything; but there was success in letterpress.

I wasn't an artist, typographer, designer or pressman—but the basics of each are known to me. I was a "printer" or to be more accurate, a "compositor." I took someone else's design and molded it through type, rules, spaces and cuts into a form that matched the idea and could be printed. With these basics I fit very well into the teaching of printing skills to students. Most of my former students know 100 times more than what I will ever know about printing.

Being a "Jack of all printing trades and master of none" has helped me tremendously during the last 17 years in running the Platen Press Museum.



MIKE DENKER #697

I was born in New Haven, Connecticut. Dad had been a newspaperman before the war and loved typefaces. When we moved to New Jersey he brought along a C & P Pilot press. I loved that old Pilot and played with it for years before learning what it really could do. About the age of 13 I saw a movie about the settling of the west that showed a 19th century print shop. This sparked my interest and pleased my dad. I had not been a very promising student and suffered from dyslexia. I suspect dad thought that setting words and sentences upside down and backwards might help cure me. I took to the craft with zeal and soon graduated to a Golding Pearl. By the age of 15 I was designing and printing school play announcements and working on Saturdays at a local letterpress shop.

Today at the age of 65 I am still collecting wood type and printing. The printing process for me begins with an idea in words and then trying to use wood type to make the message more visually arresting. I do not worship either beauty or legibility but try to make a statement that is seen first as a visual image almost before it is read. I realize that for many printers this is heresy.

With two Vandercooks, a C&P platen and a hand press to create pieces, it's all pure fun for me. My printing friends in the Washington, D.C. area are the spice of my life and as varied as the wood type in my cases.